



FIRE SERVICES TRAINING SCHOOL

750 6th Street Southwest, Suite 205
Great Falls, MT 59404-3297

Telephone (406) 761-7885 / 771-4336
Fax (406) 268-3735
Web <http://www.montana.edu/wwwfire>

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EXHIBIT 18
DATE 2/8/2005
HB _____

Representative Eve Franklin, Chair, and members of the Committee:

My name, for the record, is Butch Weedon and I have had the honor of leading the effort to keep Montana's fire fighters safe and competent for the past twenty-three years. I have the most rewarding job in all of state government. We serve Montana's fire fighters and the entire state is our campus.

Our vision is a competent and sustainable group of emergency responders in every community, responding to and handling the emergency needs of every citizen. Fire fighters provide much more than fire protection for us. They handle every manner of emergencies and many near emergencies. Whether a train derailment in Alberton, a heart attack next door, a child locked in a car with the keys, or a citizen who has fallen from their wheel chair, Montanans expect their local fire fighters to respond quickly and perform professionally.

The Fire Services Training School (FSTS) plays a vital role in providing those services. FSTS is an outreach education program targeting community fire fighters. We are attached to the MSU Extension Service. We receive guidance from a statutorily created Advisory Council, appointed by the Regents, and representing diverse fire service interest. FSTS saves lives and many dollars annually, and your support controls how effective we are at each.

A few examples are in order. In Plentywood, as a result of working with an FSTS trainer, the community realized a \$200,000 annual insurance premium saving from commercial property. The town of Clyde Park asked for help with their fire department a year ago. Their Mayor was concerned that many residents were unable to buy fire insurance because the rates were so high as a result of their fire department insurance rating. With our help, the town has now gone from an unprotected rating to a grade 7. In dollars, that means instead of paying an insurance premium of around \$2,000 annually for a mobile home, residents now pay around \$200. To business owners, it's meant a 30% reduction in their insurance rates.

In Geyser, a Billing woman is alive today because she was saved after a highway crash by fire fighters who had recently been trained by FSTS. Butte fire fighters were able to free victims from three recent crashes with skills and tools provided by FSTS. And this committee has heard in the past from a Wolf Point Fire Chief who reported on how two children were saved there because of the training his department had received from FSTS. Montana pays an average of 3.5 million dollars annually for "project fires." FSTS has developed new approaches to handling interface fires. Those tactics saved homes in the Flathead during the Wedge Canyon Fire. The

more training we can get local fire fighters, the more likely they will be able to minimize project fires. I thank you for positioning us to provide that kind of service and cost savings to our fellow citizens.

FSTS is responsible for introducing Montana fire fighters to new ways of doing business. FSTS introduced Training in Context, a training approach that minimizes the training time required for fire fighters to become competent. The Incident Command System was first taught by FSTS in the early 80's and allows supervisors to integrate differing jurisdictions and assure accountability and safety for responders. A new approach to removing the super heated gases and smoke from fire buildings was introduced in the early 90's and has enabled fire fighters to reduce property damage and operate more safely. Compressed Air Foam Systems are being introduced today and have promise for areas without water supplies. Tender Shuttles were introduced by FSTS in the mid-80's and the technology has become the standard for rural fire fighting. The mobile training props constructed by FSTS staff have provided realistic "hands on" training for our fire fighters and served as a model for others to copy.

Our Advisory Council's goal is to have quarterly training contact with 80% of Montana's 432 fire service organizations. We believe we can accomplish that with 6 strategically located trainers. With each additional trainer, we reduce windshield time and improve economies of scale. Our current staffing is 4 trainers and we are only able to reach 51%. This plan was the result of a strategic planning process, done with a grant by our Advisory Council in 1984-5. Your support for that plan will be appreciated by fire fighters statewide, as well as the citizens who save dollars.

During the past biennium, FSTS relocated off campus. As a result, the funds originally appropriated for capital replacement (OTO, \$49,000) were spent making the move. Additional costs were incurred for storage space, office equipment and maintenance. These costs were not included within our current level budget figures. Additionally, our Advisory Council is requesting the addition of one field trainer during the next biennium. This was included in the Martz budget and approved by the Regents, but is not in the current Governor's budget. If added, FSTS will be able to reach 62% to 64% of fire fighters with quarterly training services.

Two sessions ago, you funded an additional trainer for the fire service. That trainer had not been on the job for a year yet and already his presence was being felt. Our contact hours are up dramatically, but our costs are not. Adding that trainer in Missoula, meant that other trainers would not have to travel the greater distances to that area to provide service. There was a serious fire at Clearwater Junction. The commercial building had been set on fire. Two rural volunteer fire companies responded from significant distances and were able to handle that fire, save half of the building, and the owner was back in business in weeks - paying employees and paying taxes. Both of these rural volunteer fire companies are among the 51% that we are now capable of providing training services for. They could not have been before you funded that additional position!

These are just two, among many examples of impacts by FSTS in partnership with local fire fighters in the recent past, made possible by the past and present members of this sub-

committee. I am hopeful that you will be able to find the funding for an additional trainer this session, and the added costs caused by our dislocation, thereby enabling us to reach 62-64% of our community fire companies, and produce many additional examples of success and savings for our citizens.

What we do saves lives. What we do also saves money. What we do depends on you, the members of this committee.

Thank you!



Seldon S. Weedon